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ABSTRACT

There are physical, social, emotional, mental, and language factors influencing the development of readiness for independence in word recognition. It is important to let the chld gain a variety of experiences prior to school entrance, such as the parents reading aloud to the child and allowing him to follow the lines with his eyes while listening. Much research has been done on modality preference of children, holding it true that some children can learn best by a certain method. If difficulties with learning to read occur, teachers should observe each child and appraise the different modalities involved in the instruction. Activities should be provided which provide training in sensory-motor skills, auditory perception and discrimination, visual perception and discrimination, language skills, and thinking abilities. Linguistics offers insight into the reading process and reading instruction, but it does not offer a method for teaching reading. Many researchers believe that it is necessary to change the point of focus if the new knowledge about language is to be utilized so that reading programs are designated to develop word sense and to build comprehension strategies. In other words, semantic, syntactic, and phonemic-graphemic cues should be taught to help the reader determine new words. Each skill toward the mastery of reading should be over-learned until the use of it becomes a habit. References are included. (AW)

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STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING READINESS FOR INDEPENDENCE IN WORD RECOGNITION

Session: Reading and Visual Skills

RE003 672

Each decade brings forth new ideas and new techniques for the teaching of reading, and the decade of the seventies promises to be no exception. Indications are that it may be the most fruitful of any era as time, energy and money are put into the Right to Read program.

The strategies for developing readiness for independence in word recognition have changed somewhat from those of the previous decade as a result of the first-grade studies and other research that followed. A variety of approaches -- developmental, phonic, linguistic, orthographic stress, language experience, individualized reading and specialized approaches, with each having within it a number of systems or sets of

parts coordinated to accomplish a particular set of objectives, -- are available to reach this goal of this program.

The only valid reason for developing strategies to achieve a readiness for and eventually independence in word recognition is to accomplish the complex task of reading which involves interaction between the reader and the written language to the extent that the reader reacts to the message of the writer.

If reading were merely perception of words without conceptual learning occuring, it might be defined as identifying-a word list. But this writer believes comprehension must occur in even the beginning stages of decoding the written language and that the materials used to teach reading should be those that offer a child an opportunity to experience the joy and fulfillment of expectation with which he started this undertaking of learning to read. If weeks go by in which he merely works on identifying letters of the alphabet, letter-sound associations, or identification of words in a fixed spelling pattern, his interest may soon be lost to such an extent that it is impossible to motivate this child to a successful reading experience.

From infancy until entry into school, be it pre-school, kindergarten or first grade, many factors play an influencing role on developing readiness for independence in word recognition.

Weintraub (21) defines the concept for readiness for reading as the interweaving of numerous factors, physical, social, emotional, mental and language aspects that help a child succeed in learning to read.

Children's language patterns develop very early through imitation,

but other influencing factors require some planning on the part of those responsible for early training of these children. Children having opportunities to explore many areas in the community, and to accompany their parents on trips, will be ready to undertake the task of reading with a vast number of concepts already formed that will assist them in interpreting the printed page.

One of the best strategies for developing this desired readiness is one that should be done in the home by parents-or other adults. Reading aloud to children offers them an opportunity to hear good literature, to develop good listening habits, to observe others engaged in the act of reading and to understand what reading is.

As children listen to the stories read to them, their eyes may follow along the lines. They become aware of individual words, understand that words ordered in a particular sequence have certain meanings, learn to anticipate what comes next, receive an introduction to the left-to-right and top-to-bottom progression needed for reading, and acquire the knowledge that much pleasure can be obtained from printed language.

The read-along technique is employed by some basal programs and by some materials prepared for listening centers using books accompanied by tapes or records.

According to Helen M. Robinson (14) "the primary purpose of reading along is to motivate a desire for learning to read and to expose children to written language." Children gain confidence and experience success with this procedure that helps to establish a good learning climate in which to learn and in which to teach.

Pictures correlated with the narrative of a story in either basal reading material or trade books provide cues for recognizing words and giving meaning to a word or to a larger part of the context.

Some of the research questions the effectiveness of picture cues. King and Muehl (11) found that pictures provided an efficient method for teaching similar words, but not dissimilar words. Their findings do not support the view that pictures should be dispensed with in reading materials, especially as many words for the beginning reader are somewhat similar.

Samuels (15) raised further questions about the advisability of including pictures in children's books. His research to date indicates that there is no difference for the better readers in the picture or no-picture group. Among slower readers those in the no-picture group learned significantly more words.

It may be that pictures build a favorable attitude toward reading, in which case that alone would be a most worthwhile purpose for including them.

If the strategies discussed so far have not been a part of the children's learning experiences prior to school entrance, introduction to and continuation of them will be essential to establishing a background upon which to base the next steps in teaching reading.

Man apparently has three learning or neurological systems which he uses in the learning process, namely: auditory, visual and tactual-kinesthetic.

Basically, what the modality concept holds is that notation may be made regarding which child can learn best by which method. Since

the majority of children learn by any modality and have only slight preference, it seems impractical to attempt to test and classify all children. Rather, the teacher should observe each child and if difficulties with learning to read become apparent, appraisal of the different modalities involved in the instruction should be made.

Wepman (22) has found that the audile child has an adequacy of speech articulation, is sensitive to sound, reacts to fine differences in voices, responds to spoken requests, ignores visual stimuli and appears to daydream when only visual material is presented. The visile child may watch a speaker, yet pay little or no attention to what is being said, but is inquisitive about books and pictures. The tactile child loves to use his hands, performs well with puzzles, seems to be preoccupied with what he is doing, and fails to listen or look at people when he is addressed.

Frostig (3) states that numerous reading difficulties occur because of the many skills involved in the reading process and that a deficit in anyone of them might cause a problem. She lists the following skills as those involved: (1) sensory-motor skills such as eye-movement control for scanning and finger control for turning pages; (2) auditory perceptual skills; (3) visual perceptual skills; (4) language skills; and (5) the ability to think logically, draw conclusions, and make inferences.

Weiner, Wepman and Morency (20) in 1965 and Weiner (19) later in 1968 reported conclusions that discrimination of visual forms is one of skills needed to learn to read.

Research has been done relative to visual training, but in both Goin's (4) and Cohen's (2) studies, the reports indicate that there were

gains made in visual-discrimination tasks but there was no carry-over into reading. Other research has shown that pre-reading activities in visual discrimination would be of the greatest value if they provide instruction in letter and word discrimination rather than with pictures, geometrical forms and designs.

From Barrett's (1) review of the research on visual discrimination one may conclude that the more the visual discrimination task resembles the reading task the better predictor of reading achievement it will be.

Before a child is able to learn to recognize words it will be necessary for him to have adequate visual perceptual ability.

In the beginning stages of reading there is a positive oorrelation between visual perceptual abilities and reading, but according to Weintraub (21) this relationship lessens after the child has been in school several years. It is not that the visual perceptual abilities are no longer important; rather, that children are able to discriminate likenesses and differences among words well enough that measures of that skill are not useful in distinguishing the more able from the less able readers.

The visual modality, like the auditory, develops in a predictable manner from discrimination to memory and through sequential order. Visual perceptual abilities are usually developed before children enter school. However, many children need instruction in attending to the things being discriminated and this, then, becomes another important strategy in reaching the goal for independence in reading.

Reading requires more than visual perception, one of the abilities being auditory perception. Morency (12) found that there is consistent

growth in auditory discrimination and memory until it reaches fruition in about the ninth year, and that auditory measures are not in themselves predictors of success or failure in reading.

For some children the auditory modality proves the only available means of teaching the necessary skills and social attitudes, while other children according to Wepman (23) may be so deficient in that area that for most situations the children are functionally deaf even though their hearing acuity is quite normal.

The audile child may be ready to read when he first comes to school if instruction is given to him verbally. If he shows a strong preference for the visual modality he may learn easily by a sight method but have difficulty with a method having a strong letter-sound emphasis. The tactual-kinesthetic child will tend to make more rapid progress using a writing approach to reading.

The linguists have had a great influence on many of the reading programs currently in use and those just being released by their publishers.

Wardhaugh (17), Goodman (5), and Shuy (16) all agree that there is no linguistic method of reading instruction. Linguistics is the science of language and as such offers insights into the reading process and reading instruction, but it does not offer a method nor even an approach to reading.

Goodman (6) is of the opinion that it is necessary to change the point of focus if the new knowledge about language is to be utilized. He believes we can no longer be preoccupied with letters and words. He (7) has called reading a psycholinguistic guessing game which "involves an interaction

between thought and language." He states:

> Efficient reading does not result from precise perception and identification of all elements, but from skill in selecting the fewest, most productive cues necessary to produce guesses which are right the first time. The ability to anticipate that which has not been seen, of course, is vital to reading, just as the ability to anticipate what has not yet been heard is vital to listening.

Even with considerable instruction some first-grade children do not understand what a word is. Perhaps teachers should move away from word-centeredness in materials and instructions and move toward more careful development of word sense. Then, the goal, according to Goodman (16) "becomes effective reading for more complete comprehension. Instead of word attack skills, sight vocabularies, and word perception, the program must be designed to build comprehension strategies." He also states that "first, a learner knows a graphic sentence; then he knows familiar words in new sentences; and finally, he knows words anywhere, including lists."

Research has shown that phonics instruction results in superior reading achievement later. Wardhaugh (18) suggests that if existing phonics methods are better than other methods in teaching beginning reading, how much better would a phonics method based on linguistically defensible information be!

Shuy (16) believes that the child should be told, for example, that the sound /d/ is represented by the letter d and not that d has the sound of /d/, since d has no sound; it merely represents one.

Children rely heavily on the structure of language in utilizing the predictability factor to unlock new words, and beginning reading

materials should include as much linguistic redundancy as possible, according to both Goodman (9) and Shuy (16).

Yetta Goodman (10) says "what is most important in beginning reading is not the particular word but the development of strategies to use in subsequent situations."

It is easier to read and learn words in context than in isolation. Actually, there are two contexts, syntactical (grammar) and semantic (meaning) which work together to help a reader get the meaning of a word or words.

Three cues are then available to the reader in determining new words, and to become competent he will need to use all of them; syntactic semantic, and phonemic-graphemic.

Children discriminate words by letter differences rather than by shape or some other cue. The first letter of the word is the most important cue, and the last letter is the second most important one.

Williams (24) found that children receiving concurrent training in multiple phoneme-grapheme correspondence tend to use a problem-solving approach in trying out various pronunciations when meeting an unfamiliar word.

Each skill or step toward mastery of reading should be over-learned until the use of it becomes a habit.

No plan would be complete without strategies for getting the pupils' into a program of independent, personal, self-selected reading at the earliest moment. Improvement in the reading skills may be most noticeable when children read widely on subjects of their particular interest.

In additions to the strategies considered here, teachers must have time to teach, children must have time to learn and both need time to read.

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